Why do some people work harder?

By ANN ROBINSON

There are four basic reasons people work. The most obvious reason is for the money. "An honest day's work for an honest day's pay" is the foundation of most businesses and most workers.

However, there are some people who work for personal meaning, providing an employee with a sense of identity, self-esteem and self-actualization. For others the workplace provides opportunities for meeting new people and developing friendships. In fact, research indicates that employees spend more time interacting with their coworkers than with their own families. Still others work for status or rank in society. The nature of the job and the meaning it has for the employee can have a profound impact on employee attitudes and work behavior.

Abraham Maslow proposed a hierarchy of needs. He wrote that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs and that certain lower needs must be satisfied before higher needs can be satisfied. The needs were (from the lowest-level need) physiological (food, shelter); safety (insurance, security, and protection from harm); love (peer groups, recreation, affection, and acceptance); esteem (achievement, status, self-respect, and recognition); and self-actualization (creativity, growth, achieving one's potential).

Lower-level needs are met by paychecks and working conditions. Relations with self, family, workmates and peers meet higher-level needs.

Many people are motivated by receiving badges, titles, dedicated parking spaces and photos in company newsletters. However, many put all their energies into their part-time hobbies and interests and can't wait to get home from work to do the gardening or woodworking. If people are going to spend as much time at work as they do, how can you instill the same enthusiasm for work?

First, get to know your employees. Learn their needs, aspirations and frustrations. Consider the basic needs of the employees within the workplace culture. Remember they are individuals, so what motivates one will not necessarily motivate another. Put the motivation process into the total organizational context. Because someone does not appear to be working efficiently does not mean they are not motivated. Poor equipment, poor task structure or poor management could be to blame. Ensure that you reward people in a way that is favorable to your organizational goal achievement.

And develop an ongoing process to motivate employees.

Have your staff come up with creative award ideas. Have fun at work with events such as "Favorite Football Team Day." Create contests that motivate everybody, not just the chosen few. Write letters of appreciation recognizing specific contributions. Implement a personal development program for each employee. Include articles about or written by employees in an in-house newsletter. Provide employees with input and choice in how they do their work. Encourage responsibility and leadership opportunities within your company. Promote social interaction and teamwork between employees. Tolerate learning errors by avoiding harsh criticism. Promote job ownership. Develop goals and challenges for all employees. Provide lots of encouragement. Develop measurement that shows

performance increase. Make Pay Day a Pizza Day.

Implementing a few fresh new ideas each month can keep even the most mundane job fun and interesting. Finding the right motivators for your employees is guaranteed to yield many benefits.

Ann Robinson of Labor Finders submitted this article on behalf of the Marion County Chapter of the Florida Staffing Association.